

# CONFLICT TEXTILES



Overview of exhibition (Photo: Jeremy Howard)

## **Final Report by Mary Ryan, coordinator Letterkenny Amnesty group**

This exhibition took place in the RCC for almost three months and was in place for the annual acclaimed Earagail Arts Festival.

On the opening evening, Deborah invited us to consider the pieces, to think about the feelings of the maker and the traumatic events being portrayed. Emeritus Professor Gillian Robinson, Conflict Textiles Trustee, was in attendance and gave a brief overview about the collection.

The film Suitcases was shown on a loop beside the textiles and provided great context. The joy and vibrancy evident in the titular piece “From Displacement to Empowerment” shows us that people can rebuild their lives and when afforded the opportunity to heal can discover new possibilities and contribute to their new communities.

The highlights of the exhibition were the Curator’s visit during the Arts Festival and the arpillera workshop run by Deborah,

Roberta discussed the exhibition and her work with Conflict Textiles, providing a fascinating insight into the process of curation. That same weekend, we were delighted to welcome Giuseppe Mario Urso, creator of the sculpture “Sottosopra” or “Upside Down” to the exhibition. This striking piece places the Statue of Liberty and Our Lady of Guadalupe one on top of the other and in each others’ clothes and really does make you think “I could be in your shoes”. The event was well attended and followed by the official opening of the Arts Festival. There was lots of engagement with both Roberta and Giuseppe.

The arpillera workshop was a huge success. Following a guided tour of the exhibition, participants created their own arpilleras under the expert and gentle direction of Deborah. Topics covered included environmental issues, concerns around housing, obstacles faced by refugees, disability access and political violence in Nigeria.

All attendees of the RCC had the opportunity to create a piece of artwork in response to the exhibitions over the summer in the “Hands-on Art Room”, many of which were exhibited in the room.

We estimate over 5000 people visited the RCC over the exhibition period. As the exhibition was in the entrance foyer, and also highly visible from the busy walkway outside the building, at least this many people had the opportunity to view the textiles. It is our hope the exhibition led to the viewers considering both the experiences of people who come to seek safety here and how their responses to people can help them on the journey to a safer future. From Displacement to Empowerment shows us people are not defined by their refugee experience but through their strength and resilience can contribute much to our communities.

This exhibition continued the long standing collaboration between Conflict Textiles and the Letterkenny Amnesty group, which first began in 2008. Together, we have used the language of textiles and the process of making arpillera dolls to explore various human rights abuses and how we can respond to them. This has taken place in several settings but the enthusiastic and professional involvement of the RCC, especially during the Earagail Arts Festival , allows us to bring this process to a very public sphere and broaden its influence.

We hope to engage further with Conflict Textiles and the RCC in the future.



Photo Breege Doherty at the launch

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